

PAGAN  
SONNETS



O'HARA





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PAGAN SONNETS



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**PAGAN SONNETS**

BY

JOHN MYERS O'HARA ✓  
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TO  
JOHN LEWIS HERVEY



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Je suis un homme des temps Homériques; le monde ou je vis n'est pas le mien, et je ne comprends rien la société qui m'entoure. Le Christ n'est pas venu pour moi; je suis aussi païen qu' Alcibiade et Phidias. Je n'ai jamais été cueillir sur le Golgotha les fleurs de la passion, et le fleuve profond qui coule du flanc du crucifié et fait une ceinture rouge au monde, ne m'a pas baignée de ses flots; mon corps rebelle ne veut point reconnaître la suprématie de l'ame, et ma chair n'entend point qu'on la mortifie. Je trouve la terre aussi belle que le ciel, et je ne pense que la correction de la forme est la vertu.

—*Théophile Gautier.*



PAGAN SONNETS



## THE HUSHED GODS

**L**ORN are the ways from old illusion won,  
A sense of loss through all the woodland floats,  
No satyr in the myrtle thicket dotes,  
For any timid oread to shun;  
Here tells no trodden glade of sylvan fun,  
Nor winding path where fauns crossed waving oats,  
No distant piping of delirious notes,  
No tracks of vanished revel in the sun.  
Where are the satyrs dear to genial Pan,  
The oreads that bathe in Dian's pool,  
The jocund woodland horde, half goat, half man,  
The shy and fair of Daphne's coverts cool?  
Of all who worshipped once and once believed,  
Glows no Hellenic heart yet undeceived?

## TANAGRA

**O**UT of the night in that necropolis,  
And the entombing sands, the lyric joy  
Of Hellas in these lovers, girl and boy,  
Laughs sunward from the tenebrous abyss;  
As arm-entwined they still embrace and kiss,  
Caresses that may sate but never cloy,  
The heart could dream no grief for these uncoy  
Figures of terra-cotta, born to bliss.  
Intuitive, and loving earth, the Greek  
Discerned the saner wisdom that we seek;  
Weary of worship for the noumenon,  
We turn from Calvary to Helicon,  
From subtle introspection to the free  
And soul-uncaring life of Arcady.



## AQUÆ RELIGIO

**M**Y soul revolts at that ascetic sign,  
The Cross whose pity stifled Pagan glee;  
A strain of pride, imperial in me,  
Acclaims an alien heritage as mine;  
I would again, upon the Palatine,  
The body's old divinity decree,  
Proclaim the creed of carnal purity,  
And place the wreath on plastic beauty's shrine.  
Oh, I would be, at Diocletian's Baths,  
An athlete, clean of body, sure of soul,  
Emerging from the stadium to stroll,  
Symmetrical of limb, the shaded paths,  
And watch the sun a deeper bronze emboss  
The torso of Apoxyomenos.

## LEKYTHOS

**A**ROUND the amphor darts the carved Pan  
After the nymph he never overtakes,  
She just eludes the laughing leap he makes,  
The arms that would embrace her while she ran;  
O sylvan, less than god and more than man,  
Vainly you strive for loveliness that breaks  
In marble curve, beyond your reach, and wakes  
A glow half plastic, half Arcadian;  
An ardor for the forest and the gleam,  
Under the languid leaves, of naked grace,  
The careless drifting of the life of dream,  
With no appointed hour, no destined place;  
The joy to render, in a verse sublime,  
The triumph of the marble over time.

## AN ARCADIAN POOL

**A** FURTIVE shadow, stealing from the trees,  
    Troubles the water with a gray regard;  
    All day its placid mood was left unmarred,  
Nor ruffled with the breath of any breeze;  
A magic mirror, sensitive to seize  
    Skies that the flaming spears of dawn had scarred,  
    And now, ere somber gates of dusk are barred,  
Departing vesper's silver verities.  
Across the surface, from the leaning pine,  
    The creeping shadow sends a sudden chill,  
    And crimson tremors deepen and define  
The sinking chalice on the distant hill,  
Whence the last glory of the sun will spill  
    Over its fluid heart the flush of wine.

BY THE EUROTAS

**T**HE reeds of the Eurotas faintly sigh;  
Daphnis, a god is grieving! now the wind  
Is swaying them together; see, they bend  
And a sad tune is in them, Pan is nigh!  
The woods are still, a paler green the sky,  
The dead leaves strew the ways that we descend;  
Be prudent, Daphnis, lest our steps offend  
Some lurking nymph our eyes may not descry.  
The flock has wandered far, brown shepherds pass,  
As lithe of limb, with hyacinthine curls,  
But none like thee, my Daphnis! shepherd girls  
With eyes as blue as mine, some fair, alas!  
How swift the shadow lengthens from the west,  
Daphnis, my heart beats sadly in my breast!

## CHRYSANTHIS

**T**HE wooded vales are drowsy with the heat,  
Under the drooping boughs a satyr sleeps;  
The myrtle stirs! Pan from the thicket peeps,  
And blows a flute of ardor, low and sweet;  
Above the pool the branches densely meet,  
Weaving a leafy roof whose shadow keeps,  
With greener tinge upon its limpid deeps,  
A lucent gloom to lure the sylvan feet.  
Long stems and leaves of severed lilies pile  
The mossy edge and float upon the pool,  
Broken for garlands by Chrysanthis while  
She moved among the clusters, white and cool;  
The nymph who listens as she weaves a snare  
Of trailing fillets for her amber hair.

## PHÆTON AND ICARUS

**N**OT as the daring filcher of the fire,  
Scaling the heaven to bring the gift for man,  
Not so your selfish dreams of glory ran,  
Ye vain provokers of immortal ire;  
Yet were ye not, so near to your desire,  
Half pitied by the power Olympian,  
For not the ice and vulture were the ban—  
Ye fell with flaming pinions to expire!  
Oh, kinder than the bleak Caucasian heights,  
The deep Eridanus and ocean gave,  
Ye vanquished darers of audacious flights,  
The swift commiseration of the wave;  
Oh, Icarus and Phæton, well for ye  
The cooling river and the healing sea!

## THE ÆGINETAN

**B**ELOW lay Delphi and his goal of fame;  
The dawn was breaking, Phœbus from his bow  
Let arrow after golden arrow go,  
Till colonnade and temple caught the flame;  
Across the hills, so soon to know his name,  
With heart exulting, veins in virile glow,  
And sanguine for the struggle's crucial throe,  
The unknown runner from Ægina came.  
He ran, he conquered! "Swiftest foot of all,"  
The choric voices sang; in marble flight  
Great sculptors carved him; wide his city's wall  
Was breached for his return; but his delight,  
When old, was still to hear, in youth's abode,  
His childrens' children chanting Pindar's ode.

## MARATHON

**D**OWN the long slope, as through its barriers might  
A wall of water rushing from the steep,  
The impetuous Greeks in semicircle sweep,  
Their blazing helmets blending in the light;  
Against the embattled Persian hurls the bright  
Resistless billow, strewing heap on heap  
The broken ranks of Datis to the deep,  
And snatching at the galleys in their flight.  
And was it he, the great Miltiades,  
Who glimpsed upon Pentelicus the shield,  
The treacherous signal for the doom of Greece?  
Athens to save, he hurried from the field,  
Outsped the galleys of the foe and hurled  
From Xerxes' hand the scepter of the world.



## THE SOPHIST

**P**ROTAGORAS, of Abdera, today  
Speaks at the house of Kallias! O friend,  
Antisthenes, I beg you to attend,  
And hear the master sophist! Come, I pray,  
And we will shape our project on the way;  
Together we will answer him and bend  
Our subtlest dialectic to the end;  
There may be truth in what he has to say.  
And yet, no doubt, we shall divine the flaw  
That nullifies his logic, even though  
So little of the absolute we know;  
“Man is the measure of all things and law  
Is more than nature;” so his teachings go—  
Come, hear Protagoras of Abdera!

## CORINTH

CORINTH! his senses by the word are wooed!  
Incarnate is Cotytto's city seen,  
Proudly, like some incomparable queen,  
Reclining on her throne to match the mood;  
Abashless in her naked beauty viewed,  
And worshipped by the world, she basks serene,  
Her glance upon the temples where the green  
Gulf gleams between their marble amplitude.  
Corinth! the word is memory to his ear!  
He hastens back to claim the olden bliss;  
Turning the street, the temple steps are near—  
Run to thy lover, Anasyrtolis!  
Sad was the vigil, all thy roses sere,  
Long didst thou wait, flower girl of Salamis!

## LAIS

**A**ND thou didst scorn me, Anaxagoras,  
Passing my door with glances of disdain,  
And thrice I vowed to Kypris, at her fane,  
To vanquish thee, or nevermore, alas,  
Gladden to see my beauty in the glass;  
I swore to bind thee with a golden chain,  
Nor were these peerless charms displayed in vain,  
For, melting at a glimpse, thou couldst not pass.  
Am I not more than all thou dost revere?  
Canst thou not hear me, murmuring like a bee,  
My moist lips like a rosebud at thine ear?  
And are there sweeter words that thou wouldst hear?  
Canst thou not, in the arms of Lais, see  
How Eros jests at thy philosophy?

## PYXIS

**H**E coated with a ground of brilliant green  
The rounded shape of red Corinthian clay;  
Then, with a darker hue to overlay,  
Giving its oval curve an ebon sheen,  
He glazed the surface for the mythic scene;  
But first he made the vine's descending spray  
Around the rim in purple clusters play,  
And dancing nymph and satyr intervene.  
A circling pageant, then, in polychrome,  
He painted Dionysos and his train,  
The bassarids as snowy as the foam,  
The harnessed panthers like the amber grain,  
And on the cover, with a sapphire gloss,  
A ring of maidens playing kottabos.

## FROM ILISSA'S TOMB

**T**HIS polished mirror and the cameo  
Are from Ilissa's tomb; two thousand years  
Since they were laid, with his despairing tears,  
Beside her funeral urn; she died, the glow  
Of youth upon her; still her treasures show  
How fair her face; the profile, that appears  
Cut in the onyx, faultlessly adheres  
To beauty's subtle line, and just below,  
Phrygillos carved her name; her lover gave  
This glyptic gem to her, the mirror, too,  
Wherein her eyes, as from a silver wave,  
Discerned each virgin charm, the brow that knew  
His reverential lips, the mouth whose kiss  
Should never crown him with the bridal bliss.

## ACROPOLIS

**T**HE violet tint is on the fabled sea,  
Exotic fragrance freshens in the breeze,  
But not a galley toward the Cyclades  
Moves outward in the twilight's mystery;  
Along the skies, a marble epopee,  
The brow of Athens lifts its shattered frieze,  
But men forget the gods they make and these  
Are empty dwellings of the deity.  
O hill of golden temples, how the flight  
Of shadow strives to shield the wounds of time!  
And now their blasted dream of the sublime  
Retrieves its lost perfection from the blight,  
A harmony of marble that the light  
Of dawn shall strike no more in any clime.

## BAS-RELIEF

**C**RESILAS cast the bas-relief in bronze,  
And Phocion the marble copy wrought,  
A shattered slab where Grecian warriors fought  
In sculptured combat with the Amazons;  
As stricken in a flight of wounded swans,  
Ischomache unto her knee is brought,  
Recoiling with her virile maidens caught  
In ambush by the rushing Myrmidons.  
On Pythionica's sarcophagus,  
For fleeting time, it told its marble tale,  
But what may all its story now avail  
To the forgotten love of Harpalus?  
What all the struggle, and the heart's great doom?  
The word of Athenæus is her tomb!

BY DIYLLUS

I N Paros once, with faith that would not swerve,  
He wrought for love, and beauty was his hope;  
And from the neck's perfection fell the slope  
Of the white back, the clear and nubile curve  
Of arm and shoulder, and with less reserve,  
From the inviolate breast, the splendid scope  
Of flank and faultless limb; as loth to cope  
With time whose dooming verities enerve  
And desecrate, he carved no lines to claim  
The temple's shadow, but the violet light  
Of a dim garden knew his nymph and name;  
And twice a thousand years have taken flight;—  
In a long aisle of art I mused by these,  
A base and torso, son of Xenocles!



## PHRYNE'S TRIUMPH

**D**ISROBING half reluctant, half in pride,  
    Upon the sacred Eleusinian shore,  
    Where thrice ten thousand waited to adore,  
She ventured in the water till the tide  
Embraced her beauty, yielded as a bride;  
    Thus never on the natal wave that bore  
    No fairer charms, and none that ravished more,  
Rose Kypris from the sea so glorified.  
Poseidon's billow with a gentle swell,  
    Below her bosom, girdled her with blue,  
    A vesture sinking limpid as the dew,  
Until the foam around her ankles fell;  
And from the ripple, radiantly nude,  
    She claimed the worship of the multitude.

## ATTIC IDYL

**T**WO lovers, cheek to cheek, his curling locks  
    Commingling darkly with her tresses blonde,  
    Look out across the emerald sea beyond  
A slope of blossoms; shoreward, near the rocks,  
A galley rides; brown shepherds, snow of flocks  
    On the far hill; and tall the drooping frond  
    Behind the marble seat, where Lykas fond  
Holds to Karysta's lips a rose that mocks  
Their scarlet pout; an opalescent mist  
    Limns the still sea and turns the sky's deep blue  
    To rifted azure, lost in amethyst  
Of Lydian hills; and thus the painter drew  
These poet lovers with the laureled brows—  
    Was it a panel in Aspasia's house?

## MELEAGER

**W**EAVE me a garland such as Diocles  
Once welcomed from thy hand, O Gadarene!  
A wreath whose laurel intertwines its green  
With flowers that symbol Song's divinities.  
Erinna's crocus, sweet to Attic bees,  
    Nearest to Sappho's glowing rose should lean,  
    And lilies of Anyte bloom between  
The golden wheat-sprays of Bacchylides.  
But rather would I breathe the lover's flowers  
    Culled languid at the tryst in dreaming hours,  
    The crown of dill for Heliodora's hair,  
Or reddest rose for Demo's bosom bare,  
Or the fresh nosegay for Zenophila,  
    From the far garden of thy Syria.

## GREEK INTERIOR

**L**ONG shadows fill the chamber and the girls  
Like ivory tint its Greek interior,  
As might on amber velvet sleekly stir  
Four shining and superbly rounded pearls;  
One, yawning, stands, and one, awaking, whirls  
Aside her filmy robe of lavender,  
And one, upon a couch of yellow fur,  
Unheeding, in exhausted slumber, curls.  
And one lithe girl, with eyes of opal gray,  
Strange orbs that hoard some hieratic light,  
In lassitude looks broodingly away;  
Out of the present, into what far night  
Of beauty's unforgotten doom does she,  
Turning her head, with somber dreaming see?

## VIA TENEBRARUM

**H**ASTEN, Rhodanthe, ere thy beauty goes,  
And love that gives to youth its brief delight,  
No wrinkle mars thy throat whose rounded white  
Curves to thy bosom fragrant as the rose;  
Hasten, and let us love! the moment glows  
With all the mirthful charm that time must blight,  
Give me a thousand kisses, for the night  
Will come too soon, and then the long repose.  
And thou, Rhodanthe, wilt be here no more,  
And none will see thy shadow on the wall,  
No lover hang a garland at thy door,  
Or wait at twilight for thy footstep's fall;  
And I will vanish, I who now implore,  
And the vast darkness will be over all.

## FUNERAL EPIGRAM

**P**ASSER, if thine was ever for the Muse  
The glow of ardent youth, then linger here!  
Linger beside my tomb and deign a tear,  
The purest of libations none refuse!  
Here lies my dust! I felt my heart diffuse  
Through all that pastoral joy and love made dear;  
Lykas, my name; my songs they still revere  
In this, my natal isle! With thy adieus  
To Ceos, lovely Cyclad, and the shore  
That knew the footstep of Simonides,  
Pause for a lesser singer; ah, no more  
His flute will thrill beneath the olive trees!  
Passer, the lover of Praxinoë  
Breathes from his tomb a long farewell to thee!

## HYBLA

**O**LD haunter of the slopes below the blue  
Summit of Hybla, tarry nor refuse  
To tilt the rose and drink auroral dews!

This hour of dream is mine and thine the clue;  
Where are the paths Theocritus once knew,  
The villa in the vines that held the Muse?  
Far under us the wraith of Syracuse  
Curves inward with the sea and haunts the view.

O bee of Hybla, this is Sicily!

Let me breathe deep, old gods of earth and air,  
Of all that made the Pagan world so fair;  
My years are alien but the blood in me  
Mounts with the corybantic ecstasy;  
O bee of Hybla, comfort my despair!

## TAORMINA

**T**HE slow and curling smoke from Etna's cone  
Drifts up in lazy spirals to the sky,  
Far down the shores in dreamy glamor lie,  
With curving cities, purple hills that throne  
Temple on temple; up the slopes are blown,  
By sleepy winds, odors that seem a sigh;  
But desolate the theatre, where I,  
Sole listener, can hear the tragic tone,  
Rolling the golden syllable of Greece,  
Leap from the lips of pale Antigone;  
"Father, O father!" comes, and will not cease,  
The cry of anguish from her heart to me;—  
O nature's beauty, words of Sophocles,  
O templed hills, O unforgetting sea!



## THE LATIN SEA

**T**HE wonder of its blue is under us;  
    We see, with glamor of Homeric lore,  
    Shimmer the wave that lured Ulysses' oar,  
And Jason faring for the fabulous.  
Yon trellised slopes were thine, Theocritus!  
    And those trim galleys, bound for Capri's shore,  
    Dart from the cove and follow, as of yore,  
The burnished trireme of Tiberius.  
Hellas and Rome, templed antiquity,  
    Looming along thy shore, O Latin Sea,  
    Live once again beneath the dreaming glance;  
Around thee clings the virgin world's romance,  
And far beyond the Pillars of Hercules  
    Glimmers the isle of the Hesperides!

## AFRICANUS

**T**HE splendid pageant of the conqueror wound  
Superbly up the Capitolian hill,  
A hundred trumpeters responding till  
They shook the air with crashing golden sound;  
The trophy-laden chariots passed, and bound  
Captives behind them, elephants to thrill,  
Numidian chiefs, chained women, fifers shrill;  
And then the lictors, and the laurel-crowned  
Victor of Zama, in his chariot, clad  
In the deep purple with the stars of gold,  
Waving the scepter, bowing to the mad  
Thunder of Rome in exultation rolled;  
And valiant rank on rank, in glory's glow,  
The laureled legions followed Scipio.

## DII PENATES

**E**ACH autumn when the leaves had turned to flame,  
And ripened vineyards basked with purple glow,  
Across the hills and toward Posilipo,  
To the old villa of his youth he came;  
He left the city and the high acclaim  
Of consular celebrity to show,  
Firm in the rustic faith of long ago,  
Its reverence to his ancestral name.  
Slowly along the shepherd-trodden track,  
Reining his horse at times, he journeyed back,  
Pious Fabius to his boyhood's home;  
And in his heart, vain of the gods whose might  
Templed the Tiber, doming every height,  
Were dearer deities than those of Rome.

## A TEAR BOTTLE

**O** FRAGILE bauble where her grief was told,  
Long emptied of the drops that slowly slid  
Through the clasped fingers, from the languid lid,  
To fill thy frigid heart and grow as cold!  
What ruthless hand with sacrilege was bold  
To ravage thus her burial pyramid,  
And pilfer thee, her lacrymal, and bid  
Thy shattered crystal yield its tribute gold.  
Some grief memorial thou mightst avow!  
Were thine the tears the girl for Cæsar shed,  
Or when, in dire alarm, with pinions spread,  
From Antony her galley turned its prow?  
Or were they love's last pledge to him when brow  
And bust were prone, and Egypt's siren dead?

## CAIA'S STAR

**Y**ON star is thine! climbing the Roman skies,  
Above the Appian Way, as fair of light  
As when Caius and Caia knew the night;  
Yes, thine the star that nestles low and lies  
In lustrous dream between the secret sighs  
Of night's black bosom, as a jewel might,  
Cradled on some bare ebon breast, requite  
Its velvet couch with amorous surmise.  
Yon star is thine! but near me is a gem  
Of astral worth, half hidden from my gaze;  
Under the scarf, as filmy as a haze,  
It lifts its balmy dual diadem,  
My star, your heart, whose fond pulsations claim  
Mine, burden sweet, as flame that flows on flame.

## BUCOLIC

**C**OME, Melibœus, leave thy resting flock,  
The shade is grateful and thy reed in tune,  
The woods are silent in the heat of noon  
Save for the rill that trickles down the rock;  
The figs and honey wait, and we will knock  
The clinging clover from the flagon soon,  
Contentment makes our frugal meal a boon,  
Though the proud tables of the Cæsar mock.  
Fortunate shepherd, hast thou not the kiss  
Of slender Amaryllis on thy lips?  
The cares of state and wealth are thine to miss,  
And thine the day that unregretted slips,  
When hearth smoke rises from the roofs afar,  
And sunset leaves Soracte to a star.

## THE MIME

**M**ÆCENAS enters, Flaccus at his side,  
They greet the friends that pass them in the aisle,  
The marble tiers are filling fast the while,  
Patricians gossip aught that may betide;  
Fair women whisper, slaves with jars divide  
The wine they cool with snow, and slowly file  
Among the guests; slim girls appear and pile  
The urns with roses, ere the mime shall glide,  
Under their glow, from dreamed Arcadian lands;  
Ah, soon the beaked and frowning Arrius  
Shall rage to see proud Tuccia gloating on  
The lithe Bathyllus, who, with liliated hands  
And flexile limbs in postures amorous,  
Portrays the love of Leda and the Swan.

## THE LIBYAN

**T**HE chariots turn, parading once again;  
First, the white stallions of Clazomenæ,  
The victors at Nemea; then, two gray,  
Two black of Arrius; the desert strain,  
Arched neck and fiery eye, make none disdain  
The sleek brown four that follow; far away  
Idumea bred the next, a reddish bay;  
And last, the Libyan, with quadruple rein  
Curbing, while Rome applauds, the favored four;  
Breathless the circus waits! A sudden roar!  
The race is on; and still the leaders are  
Isicrates and Dion; then, a flash,  
Lo, the invincible Libyan plies the lash,  
Passing them in the whirlwind-footed car!



## SEPTENTRION

**S**TOOPING I read upon the stele this,  
An epitaph that left my heart entranced;  
“Our little child, Septentrion, who danced  
Oft in the theatre of Antipolis,  
And gave to all the joy that once was his;”  
Gray words of grief on which my eyes had chanced  
In a gray land; and, as the years advanced,  
What pain was thine, Septentrion, to miss!  
Your little feet, so blithely dancing on,  
Swift as a sunbeam out of life and light,  
Recalling love has rescued from the night;  
With graceful steps that cheat oblivion,  
You come across the ages, clad in white,  
A little ghost to me, Septentrion!

## THE HOUSE OF THE FAUN

**I** CROSS the portal but I hear no hum  
Of Latin voices in the silent street,  
No proud Pompeian host is mine to meet,  
The fountain near the peristyle is dumb;  
I wait the patron who will never come,  
Rhetor and poet graciously to greet,  
Nor will they tread with their returning feet  
The rich mosaic of the atrium.  
Unbidden to a feast forever gone,  
I catch the ghostly music of a flute,  
Where once, a bronze of Myron, stood the Faun;  
And sound of genial voices that dispute,  
Suave to affirm and artful to refute—  
Deipnosophists that banquet till the dawn.

## AVERNUS

**T**ALL cypress trees stand mournfully around  
The somber road of gradual descent;  
Easy the way by which the manes went  
To the sad realms of shadow under ground,  
The ashen way that all must tread though bound  
To life with joy or woe or wise content;—  
O Quintus, what malign presentiment  
Shakes me tonight at each uncertain sound?  
I pray the smiting gods that we may go  
Together, hand in hand, the returnless way;  
But if I fare alone, from any day  
Of our high discourse, to pale fields below,  
I shall not falter, friend, nor hear with fright  
The hound of Hades barking in the night.

## THE GARDENS OF SALLUST

**T**HE lavish ivy overruns the white  
Of girding walls crowned with an Attic frieze,  
The terraced slopes are thick with ilex trees,  
A rill falls foaming from a ferny height;  
Paths curve to nooks of pastoral delight,  
Where oleanders, nodding in the breeze,  
Bend to the dryad that Cleomenes  
Carved with the satyr seizing her in flight.  
And hidden in the trees a little lake  
Circles an isle whose shores invite the swan;  
Only red roses cover it and make  
The slender temple flush vermilion,  
Bathing its tenant in a crimson fire,  
The Goddess of implacable desire.

## A DREAM OF CALIGULA

**U**NDER her lashes lurk the flames that flash  
A mad defiance at her beauty's risk;  
Her heavy hair, red as a burnished disk,  
Unloosens as their brooding glances clash;  
She dares the dreaded scar in anger rash;  
He frowns, the pale Caligula, while brisk  
Slaves strip away her robe with silken whisk,  
And leave her nude and shrinking from the lash.  
And she, as flawless Parian, must twine  
The onyx pillar with her shackled hands,  
While ready now the swarthy Nubian stands,  
Waiting the torture-loving Cæsar's sign;  
He sees the whip flash in the flaming dream,  
And the red welt across her shoulders gleam.

## MESSALINA

**H**ER tresses flow as fire around her face,  
Fair with the bloom of youth, yet ashen old  
With the long tale of lechery untold,  
That leaves its smile of candor a grimace;  
Red lips whose kiss would fathom all the base,  
A leopard's languid eyes of greenish gold,  
And a mad heart that hungers still to hold  
The gladiator in a close embrace.  
She rides the wind of rumor like a stream  
Of flame where sun and broken tempest meet,  
And though the heart of Rome is at her feet,  
Wild deeds for beauty dominate her dream;  
And from the pyre of Ilium in her eyes,  
Stupendous conflagrations scorch the skies.

## VESPASIAN'S CIRCUS

**V**AST canopies across its crater bloat,  
Whose shadows splash the sands with purple light;  
The swarming tiers, great slopes of curving white,  
Vent roar on roar as from one bellowing throat;  
Above the din, cries of the jungle float,  
Mad howl of rage and scream of ferine fright,  
Turmoil and dust, and beasts in mangled might,  
While over all the grave Augustans gloat.  
Under their juttèd bastion tumult-tamed,  
The embers of the combat in his eye,  
Licking his bloody jaws, a wild dog slinks;  
And where the Cæsar's flambeaus flare a maimed  
Mammoth in frenzy sweeps his trunk on high,  
And hurls against the wall a writhing lynx.

## THE WAGER

**T**HUS Sextius, at the banquet's end; "I know  
You like my slave from lands beyond Tyrrhenus;  
Now mark, Vitellius, you fat Silenus,  
She is a jewel worthy of the glow  
Of that white Parian you treasure so;  
Come, let the dice decide their fate between us,  
The lucky one who makes the high of Venus  
Shall take the girl or statue for the throw."  
"Done!" said Vitellius, "the ivories quick,  
And Jove be with me that I do the trick!  
Myrina, you are mine! and my delight  
Shall flit between two works of art tonight;"  
"But wait," said Sextius, "hurry not so fast,  
I do not lose until the dice are cast."



## HADRIAN'S VILLA

**G**REEN lizards glide along the grass where erst,  
Acanthus-carved and rose-entwined, the three  
Pergolas gleamed in rival harmony;  
Vista of marble deities where first  
His dreams of art's magnificence were nursed;  
And as he passed each white divinity,  
He saw great temples rise beyond the sea,  
And Greece recrowned to sate his spirit's thirst.  
Art's regal devotee, with grace supreme,  
He pledged the purple at perfection's shrine;  
Alone the lure of Hellas held his dream,  
Above all pride of conquest more divine;  
He gave imperial years that she might reign,  
And made the world her worshipper again.

## THE BATHS OF CARACALLA

I WAS the water, cold and clear, that flowed  
    Along the Claudian aqueduct to Rome;  
    As snow I drifted from my mountain home  
And felt the genial sun that on me glowed;  
And I dissolved and left my steep abode,  
    A torrent through the wild ravines I ran,  
    Until I found the arches made by man,  
And under Roman streets a dungeon road.  
But in the baths of Caracalla now,  
    With silver gurgle from a gorgon's mouth,  
    I issue warm and scented as the south;  
And near me, on the marble steps, art thou,  
Chrysis, the slave beloved, whose charms divine,  
    Nude and immersed in me, will soon be mine!

## THE ROSES OF FAUSTINE

**H**E heard the lions in the grated den  
Roaring the challenge of their jungle wrath,  
And confident he issued from the bath,  
Rippling his splendid muscles; swiftly, then,  
With shining shield and sword he bounded in  
The bright arena, down the sandy path,  
Where the red stains, the struggle's aftermath,  
Should sweeten the flung roses he would win.  
The shouts should deafen downward plunging like  
Huge waves upon him, but his glance should turn  
From the mad rabble to a face serene;  
Under her torch-crowned bastion he would strike  
Down the last lion, seeing her eyes burn,  
And catch great roses falling from Faustine.

## THE GARDEN GOD

**A**BOVE my head, almond and lemon trees,  
Like lovers, intertwine their scented boughs;  
Such is the ceiling of my sylvan house,  
Masses of snowy blossoms that the breeze  
Stirs in the garden dear to Herodes;  
Here Annia made her sweet betrothal vows,  
She, the beloved, the long lamented spouse,  
Still mourned by him with anguished memories.  
Even upon the white exedra where  
The bases of Pentelic marble bear  
Their carven names, he ponders now and grieves;  
And in the wind that sighs among the leaves,  
He hears again the voice of Annia,  
“Where thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia!”

## THE CRIMSON RAIN

**I**N the triclinium of Cæsar none,  
Save those whom youth and beauty gave the right,  
Reclined upon the couches in the light  
Of flambeaus from the Temple of the Sun;  
And when they nodded on oblivion,  
Sated with wine and lust and jaded quite,  
Lo, at a certain moment in the night,  
The waning orgie missed the imperial One.  
And soon a rose fell from the ceiling high  
And lodged between a vestal's ravished breasts,  
Another and another, and the guests  
Caught them as rain of crimson from the sky;  
And then they struggled madly while the flood  
Fell smothering them in roses red as blood.

## FLUTE PLAYERS

WITH brown limbs crossed the girls from Cyprus sit,  
Their red lips, like the deepest tinted fruit,  
Pursed sedulous against the slender flute,  
While nimble fingers o'er the notches flit;  
The angry Claudia, brooding opposite,  
Dreams of her lover and their mad dispute,  
Then starts to follow, half irresolute,  
The brutal Goth that she in fury bit.  
The plaintive music soothes her and she stays  
The impulsive step nor hurries to the door,  
Let the Subura claim him, she would raise  
No finger now to hold him any more;  
Why longer care, with strains from flutes so sweet,  
And Glycera and Myrtis at her feet?

## THE SIBYL'S DOOM

**A**ND were the gods of high Olympus dead?  
In vain he strove to make himself believe  
That they had vanished and the world should grieve,  
Regretful of their joy forever fled;  
Had Delphi left the final word unsaid?  
Apollo's oracle could not deceive,  
He would invoke the sibyl and receive  
From her prophetic lips the sentence dread.  
And Delphi sent the last and somber word!  
Sadly he stood, with drooping head, and heard;  
"Apollo has no laurel, tell the king,  
No home, no crystal fountain now to sing,  
Deserted are his shrines where none adore,  
The world has fallen, beautiful no more!"

## ANADYOMENE

**L**O, the ineffable form their dream extolled,  
When crowning lofty hills, her temples drew  
The devotees whose hearts invoked the true  
Daughter of God that Sappho hymned of old;  
Beauty whose vision, wrought serenely bold,  
With love's revering eyes they dreamed to view,  
The carnal grace whose sway their wisdom knew,  
The gracious line of their heroic mould.  
And now, with Grecian faith, our eyes behold  
Her limbs cleave curving to their natal blue,  
Her hair, whose every tress the zephyrs woo,  
Flow free along the foam in lustrous gold;  
While conscious of the life that thrills her through,  
Soft to adoring Loves her lids unfold.



## THE FLAMING HEART

**A**RE those steep forests groves of Ilian fir,  
Over whose tops the winds of vesper run?  
Is that immobile watcher Thetis' son,  
That burning fragrance cinerary myrrh?  
Do large libations to the gods aver,  
Poured round that pyre, the vanquished Myrmidon,  
Or sleeps some weary child of Helicon,  
The sempiternal sea his thurifer?  
Disconsolate as lorn Achilles lost  
In grief and shadow on the waveward sand,  
He sees the flame, by the mad mistral fanned,  
Feed on the heart the restful hand had crossed,  
And glutted to the full of its desire,  
Thrill golden with the dead companion fire.

## AVE VICTRIX

**T**HE naked Huntress from the woods at dawn  
    Strode with her bow and quiver, while the bright  
    Auroral silver, spreading from the height,  
Revealed the covert of the frightened fawn;  
In swift pursuit, no deep abyss might yawn  
    With torrent wild to check her panting flight,  
    And here in marble, curtained from the night,  
She strides with all the grace of eons gone.  
Peerless against the silk of saffron tint,  
    Behind her hung, the carven goddess seemed,  
    And whiter than a sudden snow's descent,  
Kallista's shoulder from its raiment gleamed;  
Then regally—a crowning triumph this—  
    She stood ungarbed beside the Artemis!

## RUBRIA

**A** CROSS the shadow, in the carnal glare,  
I see you stand in semi-nude perfection,  
With eyes that turn their fire to introspection,  
And matchless limbs and comely shoulders bare;  
The insolence of beauty in your air  
Of proud dominion, scorning to subjection  
The predal lusts that rise in your direction,  
As cliffs repulse the ravenous waves that dare.  
Such posture might a pythoness assume,  
Disdainful at the immolating shrine,  
When the revealing vestal's rite was ended;  
Only the dying flambeau in the gloom,  
The body's beauty shaming the divine,  
While the voluptuous incense still ascended.



## A GREEK FRIEZE

**A**s figures on a frieze processional,  
In marble march across the metope  
Of some old temple to eternity,  
Go golden-stained of time's smooth kiss, so all  
Those loves that carved for life its coronal  
File slow across the flame of dreams for me,  
And I, with brooding reminiscence, see  
Each profile flower and fade, and shadow fall.  
They pass with gaze oblivious of mine  
That singles those undying passion knew;  
She, tigress-orbed, whose sin was blight malign  
To youth's high thought; and she, once regnant through  
Her lips' red luxury; and she, who drew  
My soul to her with song as to a shrine.

## PERPETUITY

**E**NTHRONE thy dream, and leave no tragic stress  
For vain remembrance of the mortal mood,  
But true to art's eternal attitude,  
Achieve its form serene and passionless;  
Restrain the line that trembles on excess,  
And let no vital groove of grief intrude,  
Accord each contour thy solicitude,  
Make all the curves of beauty coalesce.  
So Phidias might have spoken; such, I deem,  
His exhortation to exalt the dream,  
For dreams, that dare the absolute, repose  
Immobile in the peace that sculpture knows,  
Sublimely unperturbed, on temples bright,  
White forms to which the gods descend the night.

## THE RACE

**E**VER I follow where the vision fled,  
Match stride with stride, virile and swift as when  
After the fleet and fair Ionienne,  
Hippomenes, straining each muscle, sped;  
Ever the glimmer of her feet ahead,  
Ever the flying garment as a mist  
Floating around her, trailed by knee and wrist,  
Ever the grace revealed and coveted.  
Not thine, O Love, the race! nor thine to fling  
Unseen the golden apple of delay,  
No artifice can any goddess bring  
To crown me victor, at the goal, today;  
Endless the race the tireless runners make,  
Lost self that self may never overtake.

## A BURIAL URN

**L**ONG since he carved thee revel-wreathed that thou  
Mightst laugh at Thanatos with flute and flower,  
And bear with destiny until the hour  
It gave the dust thy heart is keeping now;  
Fond dust that erst was warm from foot to brow,  
Rescued from dissolution and the worm  
To claim from thee, after a cycle's term,  
An ultimate and meet sepulchral vow.  
Less cherished wert thou, shape symmetrical,  
For all thy circling joy of nymphs and these  
Consoling verses of Phocylides,  
Even the virtue of such burial,  
Did not the handful of her ashes rest,  
A mournful treasure, in thy marble breast.

## THE GREATER MYSTERY

**W**E journey to Eleusis, you and I,  
And walk the curving road beside the sea,  
Both pilgrims to the Greater Mystery,  
And seekers for the truth before we die;  
We who have asked of all earth's wisest why,  
And entered every temple eagerly,  
Accosters of each high philosophy,  
Now yield the futile question with a sigh.  
That sapphire is the wave of Salamis,  
Those bees are from Hymettus, and the breath  
Of Attic summer brings abiding bliss;  
So Nature turns us from the thought of death,  
And we submissive, at the darkened door,  
Accept her mood and question her no more.



## THE PAGAN END

**B**E mine thy final boon, O furnace bed!  
Where the consuming element may make,  
Rather than slow decay, my dust forsake  
The form that life has left untenanted;  
Be mine the fairer Pagan end when dead!  
Soon as the cinerary flame may slake  
Its thirst upon my body that shall wake  
To the bright world no more, then what I said,  
Friend of my heart, remember! and the white  
Funereal vase of Attic emblem bring;  
There let my ashes rest; and let delight,  
With melic flutes that fauns are fingering,  
Detain the laughing group of nymphs that turn  
In carven grace around my marble urn.



HERE END PAGAN SONNETS  
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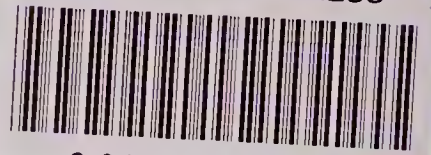








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